THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSED FOR STUDENT RETENTION

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ABSTRACT

In this paper it has attempted to bring to light some issues on the approach of retention and engagement in the further education as well as why students would leave a course.

This work has been undertaken in the UK as a case study within a college, it identifies the differences between education in engineering for part time adult learners with diverse backgrounds. There is a lack of retention and engagement, in the UK's further education (FE) colleges which current strategies do not as adequately address. The multitude of factors influencing a FE student's performance has brought together in a coherent structure that enables the needs of individual students to be identified.

KEYWORDS: Retention, Engagement, Environment, Esteem.

Introduction

This research concerns the retention of students in further and higher education in the United Kingdom. The issue of poor retention of students in further education (FE) institutions is attracting more attention from Government such as, Foster (2005), Leitch (2006), and Wolf (2011), they all point out that retention and engagement in FE programs lack clarity and direction, in addition to this further evidence from government show an interest in retention at Higher education through the forthcoming Teaching excellence framework (2016) paper.

Previous research I have conducted in this area, based on an empirical study in a further education college, this research has generated an intervention pack and model to address student retention issues in FE. The model generated from my research is called the three 'E's model, which has provided evidence to suggest that student retention is heavily reliant on engagement environment and esteem.

Concepts in theory

Research in the field of retention throughout the 80's such as Pascrella (1980) had focused on the students identifying their social factors and informal connections within the faculty theses were used to evidence why students withdrew Martinez (1998). Later during the 90's research about the role of the institutions play in retention and engagement became more prominent.

During the 21st century a range of theories highlighted the internal and external issues Chen's (2008). Theories about retention began to home in on psychological, sociological and economic issues, including the institutions role. Allen (2012) suggested that the common causes for students to withdraw are *"poor advice, information and guidance"* given during the selection of a course. This can also lead to poor, ineffective inductions in the beginning of a course; in addition Allen also suggested that the structure of the curriculum and teachers with little subject knowledge, coupled with inadequate student support would also lead to early withdrawal.

According to Morgan (2010) colleges prepare current students for future opportunities and compete for potential incoming students, they are being challenged to quantifiably identify whether students are engaging in educational practices that are preparing them for an increasingly diverse world of work. Kuh et al (2005) looked at various motivational tactics used to ensure students attended college, however this case study research has identified that there are a number of reasons that typically motivate students to devote the considerable personal and financial resources necessary to obtain a college qualification.

Theoretical framework of the Intervention pack

To further support and strengthen the framework a series of retention models have also been analysed against the model created for this paper in short the new creation is known as the three 'E's. The other retention models were first introduced in the literature review but now support new theory in this paper to suit a contemporary context.

A statement from the Minister of further education supported the fact of contextualising student learning and working with students as co-partners and bringing forward the student voice would benefit the education system that *"From basic skills through to higher education, they should be given power to shape the system in their own best interests as its main customers. Learners' perspectives provide colleges with a unique inside view of the daily activities"* John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education (2012).

The students who feel engaged feel a sense of '*personal attachment'* to their work and organisation. Motivation is also helpful to get the best out of student and help succeed according to MacLeod (2009). The aim of this section is to bring about an '*Improvement in retention and engagement, environment, esteem within further education'* sector in particular.

In short Tinto (1993) and Swail (2004) have been used to think about a new model. The difficulties of using their models is that further education culture has changed tremendously in terms of student voice and considering the student as an individual the details of this are set out below. There now follows an analysis and comparison of these seminal models.

Analysis

Tinto's (1993) Student integration model

The focus is on the institution itself and its impact on departure behaviour of students Tinto (1982). Therefore, it presents policy and procedural questions about how an institution can change in order to try and reduce student attrition.

In this paper the focus is not on what the students bring to the college in terms of skills and abilities but very much on the tutor and their role on lessening the barriers that Tinto highlighted. The three 'E's framework focuses on core competencies. Core competences are associated with the institutions workforce and courses that are identified. Faculty interaction in the model posed the three 'E's is dealt with by increasing the tutors' awareness of systematic skills in conducting personal tutorials.

Therefore considers Tinto's integration of processes of work organisations and the sharing of the tutorial outcomes in the staff room that would further the capability for peer co-operation between tutors. Tinto's model is aimed at the top level of intervention the institution of the college, but the new three 'E's model is aimed at the other levels of tutor and student's voice, therefore the framework has created new theory regarding retention. The proposed three 'E's model brings together the needs of the student and the needs of the engineering department and ultimately the college requirements for retention and engagement, environment, esteem have been met.

Tinto has considered external factors but has not captured the most important aspects amongst stake holders-that of the student's family and the students themselves. Tinto writing in 1982 would have no concept of the swing towards students as customers in terms of individual personalised learning. He would have been working within a context of managerial theory so would never have considered habitus as a reconfiguration of the organisation.

Student retention to have a stable and secure platform must have motivated and committed personnel. According to Nair et al (2008) *"the development of a strategic architecture that presents a corporate wide map of core skills may allow the institutions to make rapid changes."* For this to happen the tutor must know when to intervene and react to a student's needs.

In the proposed three 'E's model that led to the framework the intervention pack ensured the retention of the students and the workforce are considered. By using the intervention pack the tutors gained strategies, knowledge and information. The intervention pack offered an opportunity to create knowledge about the college and knowledge about how students perceived the service.

To summarise Tinto's model when compared to the proposed model of the three 'E's is using the college as a business organisation, but does not suggest a frame work but just a theory. The three 'E's model is a knowledge based model leading to a complete testable frame work.

Swail(2004) Geometric student retention model
Swail suggests that his retention can be classified into components that were based on an extensive review of literature. The components included; financial aid, recruitment, admissions, academic services, and student services. Therefore Swails model is a good addition to this paper and seems to fit modern FE colleges requirements.

Based on the platform of Tinos model of integration (1982), Swail's model takes into account five factors of a student's experience. Within this paper the research has shown that the suggested retention framework is hinged on a monitoring system that can support students.

Discussion
The three 'E's model has considered Swail (2004) and takes on the important component which is considered to be the true nature of the students' life within the institution.

An important addition to the three 'E's model is the inclusion of student's voice to identify and review the impact the college and home life has on their retention and engagement. In addition whereas Swail (2004) study had no empirical data his model was not applied in a college, therefore did not lead to a practical framework.

The three 'E's model has been developed in to a framework (intervention pack) and has been applied in a case study in a contemporary college and the application of the IP has led to empirical results. This broad approach Swails model can be seen as very general and it did not focus on specific points of the student's experience. The model appeared to be very cumbersome and data hungry. Experienced data knowledge can be required and the model is reliant on algorithms which can be confusing and over complicated.

Therefore the proposed three 'E's model met the college demands for retention and engagement, environment, esteem in a much more satisfactory way. The three 'E's does not need any extensive training and the framework (Intervention pack) is intuitive enough to be carried out by novice staff.

This literature review sees potential benefit for more empirical research aiming at identifying the effects of communication between the student and tutor. Such an empirical research should attempt to discuss how the characteristics of contextualise learning, engagement and delivery of teaching can be addressed. This is the motivation of the study upon which this report will focus on. The literature review has shown that there are many gaps in current training organisations, and potentially a large number of definitive areas for research in the field for student retention.

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